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The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology.

POLICY & PRINCIPLES.

GENERAL AIMS.

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The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology.

Policy and Principles.

The British Society of Sex Psychology has been established for the consideration of problems and questions connected with sexual psychology from their medical, juridical, and sociological aspects.

This statement, which forms the foreword to the Rules of the Society, indicates the double-sided problem with which we have to deal. On the one side is sex-psychology, a subject of scientific investigation which has only of recent years become wide and far-reaching; on the other side social custom, based often upon preconceptions immemorially old, by which problems, arising from unknown causes, have of necessity been unscientifically treated. And since on the scientific side,—in all that concerns cause and effect—we have to recognise, as students, that humanity is still very ignorant in regard to these matters, it follows necessarily that, on the practical side, in law, in medicine, and in education, humanity has been acting ignorantly, or, at least, experimentally. As a result society is faced to-day by sex-problems of the gravest character, apparently as far from solution as ever,—patent symptoms of wrong social conditions which, by common agreement, demand a new mind and mode of approach. The admitted evil of prostitution, male and female; the attendant and wide-spread existence

of blackmail which takes criminal advantage of the law as it now stands; the lack of proper safeguards for consent in sex-relations, free from all compulsion social, economic, or physical; the unsatisfactory conditions of marriage and divorce; the failure to deal equitably and soundly with the spread of venereal disease; the almost total absence of sex-training from education; all these things are a cause of weakness and deterioration to the national life. And here, where science is most needed for right and effective treatment, science, so far as popular acceptance is concerned, is most lacking. We need, far more than we have it to-day, the co-operation of all classes of society,—experts willing to state and explain, laymen willing to learn. We need a general understanding that a huge unsolved problem of double aspect, intimate in its effect upon the lives of all, stands at our doors: on the one hand human nature waiting to be investigated; on the other failures in our social treatment of it needing to be exposed. The work of the Society will be to focus the conscience of the community on both sides of the problem.

Many branches of the sex-problem will occupy the Society's attention: the study of some of them has been hindered,—at times made even impossible—by the weight of moral judgment passed upon their outward manifestations; while other manifestations, because their significance in relation to the whole question of sex was not appreciated, have been treated as though socially unimportant, and no moral judgment whatever has been passed on them. In some cases, that is to say, ignorance and moral judgment have gone together to decide how certain problems should be treated; in other cases ignorance combined with social indifference has allowed them to be left to their own solution of natural decrease or increase. And when we consider instances of these two treatments side by side, it can hardly be said that an alliance of ignorance and moral judgment has produced better results than a fortuitous leaving of the problem to take care of itself.

It is not the business of our Society to say that moral judgments ought not to be formed, or that they may not have a very valuable place in the solution of our social problems, and the strengthening of those materials of life which are the real basis of a nation's wealth; but it is very much the business of the Society to insist that moral judgments founded on ignorance are more than likely to produce bad results, to insist also they must ever be open to revision in the light of fuller knowledge.

In the middle ages society assumed that ecclesiastical authority was the safe repository of natural science; and as a result it persecuted and endeavoured to exterminate those who held that the world and the solar system were of an altogether different construction from that described by theologians. The results of that assumption seem laughable to us now; but they were no laughing matter when the moral judgments arising therefrom were enforced by the civil arm.

We are faced to-day by a very similar position. The official mind wherever it is found (as inadequately equipped for the task as were the censors of Bruno and Galileo,) makes assumption to-day of knowledge about human phenomena, and of the right to pass judgment thereon, as arrogant as were claimed in the 16th and 17th century with regard to astronomy, and shows an equal readiness to condemn on moral grounds those who are determined to question and to investigate even its most cherished conclusions.

All of us probably have some moral judgments, stubbornly or strongly founded; yet it is a sign not of strength but of weakness if we will not allow their investigation. In the face of problems like those with which our Society has set out to deal, such free allowance is almost the first requisite for membership. We must recognise, what perhaps, is never easy to recognise in its entirety, that point of contemporary blindness which most affects the social mind of our own day: it is no longer a refusal to believe that the world is round or less stationary than the sun; it is rather a reluctance to admit that human nature is a much more open problem than has ever yet been allowed by our moralists and theologians of the past. Human nature is the unknown land which the pressure of our social problem is now forcing us to explore. We believe that in regard to it too many previous explorers have made false maps, unverified in the localities they treat of, and have set up sham landmarks, which have failed to make safe our course.

With this statement of our general standpoint, we issue, as our first publication, and as one individual illustration of that for which we aim, a paper which was read by one of our members at the Society's Inaugural Meeting held on July 12th, 1914. The views which it sets forward on certain points are in no way binding upon the Society; but the claim there made for a free investigation of all sex-problems however difficult, and however prejudged by the popular mind, is one which must command the sympathy of all who wish to become members.

General Aims.

The British Society for the study of Sex-psychology welcomes you to-night to the fact of its existence, and we hope you are here to welcome it. As a Society which intends activity over a wide field, so soon as the sinews of war are given to us, we might define ourselves in many ways. But perhaps our standpoint is most comprehensively defined when I say that we are a note of interrogation. We intend to question things that have not been questioned before. We intend to enquire into them—to examine the authorities who have laid down the law about them—often, we believe,—always, it may be—on very insufficient grounds; and we mean to push our enquiry on the basis of men and women working fearlessly and frankly together over territory that is really common to both, but which, hitherto, has been ridiculously cut up, separated and divided.

A notice warning us of "Ancient Lights,"—but really meaning "ancient darkness" has long stood between us and all chance of profitable building upon the land of our inheritance. That notice has got to come down. Convention must be no bar: for behind all conventions lie germinal forces infinitely older, infinitely more venerable, which conventions, formed on narrow and incomplete premises, tend only to hide. Convention may often have right and truth in its keeping; it may cover truths whose meaning and value have become obscured by time, it may contain some snippets of justice and good sense. But those snippets will be in proportion to the knowledge and understanding on which the convention formed itself and was afterwards kept going,—and not in proportion to the ignorance, original, or acquired through long habit. Ignorance, refusal to discuss, to review, to re-consider, has never solved anything, and never will.

And so we have set out to deal—or to ask society to deal—with a vast amount of neglected material lying at our very doors, possessing life, but for that very reason the more liable, if neglected, to breed corruption and decay. Dirt has been defined as "matter misplaced." Corruption we might define, I think, as living matter neglected, or misused through ignorance. The ignorant handling of living matter clears up nothing and protects nothing. And I am inclined to think that a refusal to examine things down to their very foundations is often the cowardly defence of ignorance which does not want to be found out, or to have its settled conclusions disturbed. You cannot make matter non-existent. Living, or dead, whether you use it or abuse it, it is there, responding to the use or the abuse; but in neither case diminishing in amount, only altering its quality, assuming other aspects for good or ill.

The most important material with which society has to deal is human nature: and sometimes one is tempted to think that it is of human nature that society is most afraid. And so, if anything we say to-night frightens some of you, it will be because you are afraid of human nature—or of fuller knowledge concerning it. But all the fear in the world will not rid you of it; nor will any driving of it to live out of sight make the material of your problem any less in amount. Are we to treat human nature as the early Victorian lady treated telegrams?—the lady, I mean, who, whenever one of those modern portents came to the door, rushed upstairs with it and hid it at the back of the top-shelf of her linen cupboard, as though by such action she could wipe out facts or avert catastrophe.

Let me put before you, then, quite briefly what attitude the Society intends to assume toward the subjects it has to consider. First and foremost, it will maintain that we must never be afraid to to investigate. Secondly, that we must never assume that phenomena, which have not yet been investigated, are unimportant or negligible merely because science happens to have neglected them, or because society happens to dislike them. And thirdly that we must not pass judgment or condemnation on anything that has obviously missed a thorough scientific investigation, or which still presents to the instruments of science a nebulous aspect.

It may be that our most difficult line of work—the line of work which will require most courage on our part, and most patient countenance from our members—will be insistent investigation, combined (so far as we as a society are concerned) with a suspen-

sion of judgment, in regard to those things which we are investigating; and a single-minded determination to supply full material to others for their better judgment, while refraining ourselves from passing any judgment whatever.

That, I think, is very important. We may hold strong views individually about the right or the wrong of things: but here, within our Society, we are only social analysts. That which is unanalysed, we say, cannot be rightly treated. And if we are to collect the human documents which will be required for supplying the necessary material, and the necessary impulse for sound and expert treatment, to doctors, lawyers, and teachers, we must not ourselves adopt the condemnatory attitude, or pronounce moral judgments. We may individually feel that the phenomena we investigate have to be curbed and controlled for the good of society: but our duty, as an examining body, will be merely to supply others with material for a fuller and a sounder judgment, and for a far more expert treatment, than they at present possess. We, as a Society, are here to set going the machinery of investigation, to arouse interest, and to fight that careless and cowardly attitude—shameful to the sociologist and the scientist—which avoids enquiry in certain directions because the subject is unpopular, or difficult, or painful, or—for any other insufficient reason— a "forbidden" one. Is it not rather appalling that to a great International Medical Congress* on sex-questions, to be held this autumn, only one official representative goes from this country, while other countries are sending doctors by the score.

Because sex-questions are pornographically attractive, are they therefore to be neglected by those who have a clean-minded longing for their solution? We have to-day become painfully aware that the social problem in nearly every department has overtaken the organizing efforts of our experts and administrators: partly because those experts have so small and unorganized a public to appeal to in the presentation of their conclusions. Part of our work, therefore, carried on mainly by lectures and by the issue of pamphlets, original and translated—will be to organise understanding in the lay mind on a larger scale, to make people more receptive to scientific proof, and more conscious of their social responsibility; so that, at the back of the experts, when they pronounce judgment, will be a greater weight of public opinion—more available for

* This Congress has now, owing to the War, been postponed *sine die*.

organised expression—ready and willing to move others in the direction pointed by science.

We laymen and women—many of us not experts ourselves—have become aware of a stupendous ignorance lying all around us in relation to sex-questions, and also, I fear I must add, of a self-indulgent indifference. The man who has got his own individual sex-interests sufficiently well suited and provided for, inclines to be indifferent to the fact that sex-questions generally are in a horribly muddled condition. And yet those conditions are to-day involving us and the whole of society in their evil consequences. We have to recognise, for instance, that the least scientific, the most haphazard branch of our training and education of the young, or of our social organisation, is that of sex. It is the most unsolved problem, because the most burked. Because many of its manifestations are evil, we have shunned speaking of them. Because we have not to hand the solution of Prostitution—and are nowhere near it—therefore, prostitution being so ugly and evil, we have burked the task of making its facts known and understood by society in general; and especially have we burked an honest statement of the huge and tenacious hold it almost necessarily has on society as at present constituted. But do not think, when I say that, that I am saying one word in its defence. Society breeds prostitution: that is what is the matter. But society does not like to be told so.

Our platform reformers, on the other hand, go into the question as though determined to be ideally blind. By being so, or pretending to be so, they can make a popular appearance. Because temperance and continence are ideals of self-discipline to which some have attained, and which many pretend to, nothing half-way between that and the present worst is acceptable to our moral extremists. A ready-made morality, put up for public show on platforms, stands between us and honesty. It is the most difficult thing in the world to get honest talk upon sex questions on public platforms. I know, for I have tried, and have failed again and again to satisfy both my own conscience and my audience. Unless you take the idealist line you will probably be abused and told that you "advocate vice."

It is the same with Inversion. We have faced that problem with a petulant and a disgusted ignorance, priding ourselves on a refusal to consider it at all. And meanwhile, Inversion goes on breeding apace, taking the most deplorable outlet in underground

conditions. Yet if we say that the surreptitious combination of invert-prostitution and blackmail which at present exists is the worst solution of a case that cries out for medical investigation, we are at once threatened with the charge of "advocating vice." If we say that the law deals ignorantly and even dangerously with that barred and tabooed subject, we are liable to assault from moralists who would die rather than examine into the origin and causes of that mysterious phenomenon of human nature.

Closely related to this comes the question of sexual-Ignorance in girls and boys. At school we drill into the minds of youth the meaning of the dead languages, and shut from them the meaning of the living language of the blood. We never say of the former "it is unnatural that they should know these things:" but we do sometimes say it of the latter. Yet in this case the knowledge is inevitable; and the mind does not stay a clean vacuum till suddenly full knowledge comes to tenant it. Ignorance breeds quite as quickly and much more riotously and licentiously than knowledge.

The neglected mind may become diseased just as much as the neglected body; and I think the unimaginative hardly realise the terrible mental strain it is—especially to sensitive natures in youth—to come upon shock after shock of something unexplained, but ingrained and unavoidable, the weight of which for ever increases through the early years of development and puberty; and all taking place within a forbidden area, secretively cut off from that frank expression of life which is the normal code of youth. You thrust upon the mind of the growing child two incompatible courses of conduct, frankness and secretiveness, self-confidence and self-distrust; and during that crude stage of development—when self-realisation is going on at a gallop—you leave to boy or girl the solution, almost unaided—in the darkness of their own thoughts—of the most difficult problem of life: a problem of which grown society has itself made a most hideous mess. And perhaps it is because we have no good solution to show, in the broad face of society, that we shamefacedly conceal the very existence of these things from the young until too late when we discover that the mischief has already been done.

Here again it will be part of our work to invite more courage and honesty in parents and teachers, and to give documentary reason for regarding ignorance as the most dangerous solution. Youth is really our test in these matters. For when you come to examine you will find that practically all our sex problems have

their germ in early youth. And that being so we are bound c enquire of society—"At what stage do you think it wis: and humane and remedial to treat these troubles on the crimina and punitive lines"? If you do not think it wise and humane so to treat them in the very young, at what stage of human life does it become right and just to do so without regard to attendant conditions—without, that is to say, calling in medical science to aid? Is it ever wise, at any stage, abruptly to hand over this class of problem to the tender mercies of the law alone? Can the law alone solve them, or act curatively or beneficently towards them? Ought we not always to have medical assessors in such cases to assist the law; ought not our sanatoria to be as open to them as our prisons?

For in truth many of these problems are of a nature that the law cannot deal with: they lie too much outside the logic of its purpose. In a wise State you must permit many things that you do not approve, because the law is not the right means for treating them. Where the law merely effects a transference of activities and not a cure,—driving below the surface things which still go on—it is certainly useless, and probably harmful. You cannot bring a thing into form by one-sided pressure: you can only impress an aspect to flatter the popular eye, and make it seem that the law has power which it has not.

Certain forms of marital indulgence, for instance, though bad for man, for woman, and above all for the race, cannot be suppressed by law. But to assert that legal repression is not the right means of approach—that such interference may do harm not good—is not to approve the practices referred to. It is only to assert that root causes must be got at, first by clear understanding of their origin, and then by remedies directed to origin rather than symptom. Many of us may regard the imposition of marital relations on bearing motherhood as an unnatural act. Yet it is probably a normal practice in this country, both with and without the wife's consent. But that is a matter in which the law can only interfere safely by securing to the wife conditions of freedom and of choice by endowed motherhood, or by otherwise making more secure her economic status, not by putting its legal veto upon the practice. I could raise other points intimately sexual and extremely usual, but perhaps they can better be dealt with in papers of a special rather than of a general character. Only do, please, rid us of the

imputation that we advocate all those things which we say the law cannot properly touch.

Indeed, I doubt whether we shall ever definitely advocate any cut and dried method for dealing with unsolved problems —except the method of fearless investigation, for the increase and dissemination of knowledge. We shall publish,—it is quite likely—side by side in the same pamphlet, opposite conclusions formed by opposing schools. Our aim will be much nearer satisfaction when we have thus put the thinking public in possession of two points of view—however opposite—than by merely leaving them ignorant of the grounds on which either is based.

Another section of our enquiry is Disease: not necessarily venereal. It is fairly evident that many of the sexual phenomena we have to deal with will be found to have a connection in disease. But others, it is equally likely, may have a connection in growth, in re-adjustment of life to new ends; and may, in fact, deserve to be classed rather as growing-pains than as ailments. That being so, disease necessarily comes within the scope of our enquiry. If you find certain phenomena in obstinately healthy bodies,—in children born of good stock and of clean up-bringing—well, there is something on which we need medical pronouncement to guide us to clearer conclusions, and to class for us what should and what should not be treated as disease.

In this connection you will see that one of our branches of enquiry is, Abberation of various kinds. The warp from the normal, or the cult of the unusual, which manifests through special and localised attractions in the amative relations, and which goes by the name of Fetishism, may, if properly studied be explanatory of much which now seems dark and forbidding. In a good many of its forms it may strike those who are not subject to it as rather ridiculous, or at any rate trivial. But in other forms or developments it is not trivial at all; and it is very closely related in its origin to things we are bound very seriously to consider and get to the root of. Certain forms of fetishism have indeed become so normal, and are so harmless, that we do not recognise them at all. The bulk of us may be subject to them without knowing it, and so, accepting the symptom merely as a social habit or as a racial characteristic, may be wholly unaware that we are innocuously connected to something which, of precisely similar origin but of different manifestation, arouses our wraths or our scorn.

Are the less usual—the so-called less normal instances of fetish-attraction necessarily more insane than those which we ourselves harbour and practice? If not, then should not a knowledge of our susceptibility to fetishism lead us to have more charity and understanding toward others, in whom it takes a more unfortunate—possibly even a dangerous form. And even in cases which must obviously be controlled, because they infringe on the liberty and well-being of others—such for instance as that terrible by-product of fetishism, the instinct which finds its sexual satisfaction in blood—even there it is well for us to remember that, however repugnant the aspect, at root there may be a relation of origin between this and forms of eroticism the most harmless that we could name.

I speak but as a layman on these subjects, having no claim to expert knowledge. And I own frankly that I am mainly drawn to this Society by that principle of its constitution which admits to the discussion of these subjects men and women upon an equal footing. It is because we believe that nothing concerning sex can be rightly dealt with apart from the full equation—men and women thinking and working together for a common understanding—that no sex-problem has ever yet been rightly dealt with by one sex deciding and acting alone, and that in consequence of decisions so formed and so acted on society is suffering to-day—it is because we hold this to be fundamentally true that we ask you to give countenance and aid to our new Society, whose main aim is the co-education of grown men and women in matters which vitally concern both sexes alike.